

PENTECOST 10A 09-08-2020 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Genesis 37.1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105.1-6, 16-22; Romans 10.4-15;

Matthew 14.22-36

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Last week, we heard that Jesus was trying to have some time by himself and ended up feeding 5,000 people. This week we hear that Jesus finally managed to get away to pray on his own, having sent the disciples off to cross the lake in their boat.

Some hours afterwards, early in the morning, they were still battling rough weather as they tried to get to shore. It was perhaps still dark- and there were big waves and strong wind- so some of the disciples might have been a bit anxious.

If I'd been there, I would have been hanging over the side losing my bread and fish supper! I get seasick on a wet footpath. The disciples who were fishermen by trade were probably not too worried, because they were used to the weather conditions on the Sea of Galilee and would have been out in all weathers. Maybe the seasoned sailors reassured the nervous ones; maybe they laughed at the queasy ones. But they wouldn't have been particularly frightened. Until they saw Jesus, walking on the sea towards them. THEN they were terrified. They thought it was a ghost.

Peter spoke up- as Peter often did- and said, "If it's really you, Jesus, command me to come to you on the water." Was he brave or foolish? Anyway Jesus invited him, and he stepped out of the boat.

When he realised what he was doing, we are told he became frightened. I should think he did! But Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, and they got into the boat.

In his inaugural sermon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, encouraged the church to be like Peter and to get out of the safety of the boat. "We are called to step out of the comfort of our own traditions and places, and go into the waves, reaching for the hand of Christ." Archbishop Welby is in no doubt that what Christians need most is courage: "the present challenges of environment and economy, of human development and global poverty, can only be faced with extraordinary courage."

A definition of courage is: *The quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery.*

I don't agree. I think it takes real courage to have fear, to be really afraid, and do it anyway. How can it be courage if you are not afraid? There are things we should be afraid of.

Nelson Mandela said:

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

On a slightly less exalted level, John Wayne said:

Courage is being scared to death... and saddling up anyway.

So when Archbishop Justin tells us that the church needs courage, and needs to step out of the boat like Peter, what does he mean? What do we need courage for, as members of the church here in Carine-Duncraig?

In the letter to the Romans we hear: *"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

The bit about 'believing in your heart' is one thing, but 'confessing with your lips' - well, that's a different thing entirely. That would mean I'd have to talk about what I believe, I'd have to tell someone - and that takes courage. It might not require the level of courage that a soldier needs when the enemy is shooting at them, but not everyone finds it easy to talk to others about something that seems so personal, like their own faith and religion.

Of course, in some ways it's easier for me: I wear the dog-collar, I'm identifiable as the 'religious' person, and I've had years to get used to talking about Christianity and sharing my own faith. It isn't as easy for those who may work with people who are scornful or sceptical or even antagonistic towards anything religious. It isn't easy when your own family thinks you're strange because you go to church, or when your friends don't share your beliefs.

In fact many - if not most - Christians spend all week in the company of people for whom religion, spirituality and church play no part in their lives. It takes courage to talk about your faith to them. You risk being laughed at, ridiculed, or even ostracised.

The letter to the Romans goes on: *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved". But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?*

In other words: unless somebody **tells** them, people won't know about Jesus.

We're talking about evangelism; but before you switch off and think I'm talking about Billy Graham-style revivalism or street-corner preaching - I'm not. Those things have their place and time perhaps, but maybe not around here!

I'm talking about what some have called 'gossiping the Gospel'. Conversational faith-sharing, if you like.

Not beating anybody about the head with a great big Bible but having the courage to speak when there is an opportunity.

For example: neighbour says, "We have a big family breakfast on Christmas morning and give out the presents, because Christmas is all about kids, isn't it?" You reply, "Well our kids get up at the crack of dawn anyway, and then we like to head off to Church and celebrate Christmas together. Maybe you'd like to come with us this year?"

Or a workmate says: "I'm sick of religious do-gooders interfering in things like assisted dying legislation or climate change. Politics and religion don't mix and they should stay out of it!" You reply, "Maybe, but aren't these are ethical issues? Do you think people of faith might like to contribute to the discussion?"

These kinds of conversations might lead on to questions about your beliefs and opinions; they might not. Having the courage to speak up is what's important, and you will find the more you do it - the better you get at it, and the more natural it becomes. You can try practising here at morning tea time!

We have been given so much by the God who loves us; sharing that love around with people who don't know about it is a wonderful thing we can do for them. And then it's up to them to choose.

Peter accepted the invitation and got out of the boat, and when he was afraid Jesus held out his hand and helped him. Jesus will do the same for us: do we have the courage to step out of the boat?

The Lord be with you.